

Wisconsin Folks: Masters of Tradition



Jarrold Stone Dahl was born in 1973 in Ashland, Wisconsin, and now lives a few miles to the east on the Bad River reservation with his wife, April and their four children, members of the Bad River band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe). He is of Scandinavian heritage. They live close to the land, making their living by producing handmade objects from materials they harvest locally. Jarrod came to this position through a series of skilled trades experiences.

Jarrold has been a professional woodworker since 1993. He began as a laborer on a construction crew, learning on the job. A few years later, he turned to building traditional Swedish log houses and a few years after that became an apprentice in a traditional wooden boat shop. From there

he moved into timber frame construction. "Throughout this period, I was learning many things about wood and how to work with it, its uses, and the history related to that. That research, and my interest in anthropology, led me into gathering local materials and creating traditional folk art."

Jarrold applies his skills with hand tools by producing a variety of objects, including snowshoes, hand-turned wooden bowls, spoons, cradleboards, skin boats and birch bark baskets. For the apprenticeship, Jarrold worked with apprentice Patrick Mayotte on birch bark canoes. Patrick, the Historic Research Coordinator for the Bad River Tribal Historic Preservation Office, wanted to contribute to the cultural continuity of the tribe through the project. "We would have a genuine birch bark canoe for use in our community as a learning tool for historic preservation purposes. I intend to bring an awareness of the birch bark canoe of our cultural heritage back to life here at Bad River."

Jarrold and Patrick built two 14' canoes during the apprenticeship. "For those who are not familiar with the process, it begins with birch bark. Not just any bark, but a certain quality...not too thick or thin, flexible in both directions, with solid under-flexing. By this I mean resisting delaminating. This type of bark is hard to find, maybe one out of 500 plus trees – maybe even more. Then it's cedar, light and strong (for the gunwales and ribs). But finding a straight-grained cedar is harder to find than birch bark, at least in my territory. Then there is the hardwood for the thwarts; I use ash for its strength-to-weight ration. And last but not least is the root...spruce, jack pine, tamarack all have their place. The boat is held together with these roots and spruce pitch to seal the seams."

The instruction taught the process as well as related stories and a deep appreciation for how strong and clever the Ojibwe ancestors were. "The birch bark canoe has been associated with the Ojibwe culture for hundreds of years before the metal or wooden canoe was introduced. This was probably the first bark canoe built on the Bad River Reserve and by a member of the band since the '50s. People were very impressed, especially some of the tribal elders. They remarked that it was good that we were keeping a traditional craft alive."

"...there was this unquenchable drive to try new things." Jarrold Stone Dahl